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SONS AND FATHERS

c, *Lost Sons: God's Long Search for Humanity* (London, SPCK Publishing, 2012. £9.99. pp. ix + 150. ISBN: 978-0-281-06214-0).

Elder biblical sons get a raw deal. Cain, despite observing the divine vegetarian command, has his offering rejected and so commits fratricide. Ishmael is banished along with his mother, then his half-brother gets all the attention. Esau is conned out of his rights by his upstart twin, Manasseh inherits less than his brother, and the sons of Jacob and Jesse are all passed over in favour of their baby siblings. Other sons also suffer. Canaan gets punished for his father's mischief, Isaac is almost killed by his own piously zealous father, who then completely ignores him, and Moses doesn't even know who his father is.

Sadgrove attends well to the literal details of his texts and to the familial relationships they depict, which he rightly sees as generative for christology. His writing is fluent and brims with biblically-based pastoral insights, such as on the intergenerational transmission of familial dysfunction. He reminds us that the problems of sons are often due to weak father figures: Adam, who let his wife bring up the children unaided; Isaac, whose body and mind were incapacitated and his marriage broken; Elkanah, who allowed his boy to be brought up by clergy.

In the Old Testament, family disputes are occasionally resolved. Isaac and Ishmael are movingly reconciled at their father's burial; Esau accepts some of his brother's wealth and lives comfortably. Sadgrove rightly sees, however, that the genealogy of conflict between fathers and sons is only truly interrupted by Christ's sacrifice on the cross and his resurrection. The book originated in a series of Holy Week addresses, and so this is its clear and convincing conclusion. We might, however, remain alive to the ambiguities of even this reconciliation. Christ is himself estranged from his father, confusion reigns about who is father is, and in places he disowns his biological family. Some reflection on these problems, such as manifested when Jesus as a boy teaches in the Temple, might contribute further understanding of divine sonship.

How might feminist readers react to this book? Although it shows that, at least in scripture, most of the trouble is caused by men, women have a relatively low profile, appearing only around the edges of male conflicts. Nevertheless, by focusing consciously on specifically male-gendered problems, Sadgrove helps fill an increasingly obvious gap, contesting the continuing tendency to cast all sons as lost to explicit theological and biblical reflection.

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